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SUBJECT: Bangka Elections: Age, Guile, (and Money Politics) Propel  
Old School Politician past Young Reformer

11. (SBU) Summary: Bangka Belitung Province very narrowly elected Eko Maulana governor on February 22. The election was plagued by flawed voter lists and other problems, but logistically ran smoothly and peacefully. Eko, an old school politician, aggressively used race and religion to attack his strongest opponent, an ethnic-Chinese Christian who made a name for himself fighting corruption and improving government services in southern Sumatra. He also used his position as local chair of a new, well-financed political movement from Jakarta known as Barindo (Barisan Indonesia, Indonesian Front) to, in the words of his opponents, "flaunt campaign rules and buy votes." Barindo's supporters call these criticisms sour grapes and promise the organization will play an increasingly large role in local and national elections. Given Eko's narrow win - less than 2 percent - the negative campaign and money politics may well have been what pushed him over the top. End Summary.

Bangka-Belitung province (Babel) Elects a Governor

12. (U) Bangka-Belitung (Babel) is a small province comprised of a group of large islands off Sumatra's southeast coast. The islands' mines generate the majority of the world's publicly marketed tin and, until recently, the island's "Montok" pepper was the standard used by international spice traders to define the high-end of the pepper market. Babel is also a major producer of rubber and palm oil. During the colonial period, the Dutch imported large numbers of Chinese to work the mines. Consequently, more than 25 percent of the island's population is ethnic Chinese, many of whom speak a Chinese dialect as their first language.

13. (U) According to unofficial counts, Bangka Belitung province (Babel) narrowly elected Eko Maulana Ali (Eko) governor on February 22 in peaceful elections with slightly more than 35 percent of the vote. He beat his closest opponent, Basuki Purnama (Ahok), by less than 2 percent.

14. (U) The governor elect, Eko Maulana Ali, ran under the banner of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party and three Muslim parties: the Justice Welfare Party (PKS), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), and the National Mandate Party (PAN). Eko is a retired Navy Captain and former Regent of Bangka district. He spent a year in the United Kingdom studying hydrology and has participated in short-term training programs in Australia. His running mate, Syamsuddin Basari, was formerly the head of the legislature for Belitung regency.

## The Campaign: Money Politics, Race, and Religion

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15. (SBU) Eko's campaign relied in part on his accomplishments as Regent. According to journalists and other local figures, however, the heart of Eko's campaign strategy boiled down to race, religion, and money politics.

### "It's Better to Eat Pork than Vote for a Kaffir"

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16. (SBU) Eko's strongest competitor was Basuki Tjahja Purnama (Ahok), an ethnic-Chinese, Protestant Christian reformer whose struggle to improve government services and fight against corruption as regent in a Belitung backwater led prestigious Tempo magazine to name him as one of 10 people who are "Changing Indonesia." A transparency NGO has used Ahok's district as a model for clean government.

17. (SBU) Early in the campaign, Eko openly told supporters that it was their responsibility to elect a Muslim as governor, and members of his campaign staff distributed pamphlets in mosques with the headline "It is Better to Eat Pork than Elect a Kaffir." In an organized campaign allegedly sponsored in part by Eko, Imams throughout the province preached against giving political power to non-Muslims, and several well-known ulamas jointly issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims to vote for a non-Muslim. Throughout the campaign, the current governor, Hudarni Rani, who was also competing in the election, used Eko's strategy to his advantage by quietly encouraging the anti-Chinese rhetoric while publicly blaming Eko for playing the race and religion cards.

18. (SBU) In some cases the attacks were not limited to simple rhetoric; numerous acts of intimidation against the Chinese and

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Christian communities were reported. In several areas graffiti threatened that Babel would become a "second Poso" if a "Chinese kaffir" were elected, and posters warned people that they would be beaten "black and blue" if they voted for a Chinese candidate. Some of Ahok's leading supporters claimed that letters were tacked to their front door warning that their homes would be burned should Ahok win the election.

## Gus Dur Promotes Ethnic and Religious Harmony

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19. (SBU) Against the backdrop of the widespread anti-Chinese campaign, former President and Muslim leader Abdurrahman Wahid (aka Gus Dur) came to Babel to endorse and campaign on behalf of the Christian candidate, Ahok. Gus Dur is still widely respected in both the Muslim and Chinese communities in Babel. According to numerous observers, Gus Dur's speeches and media interviews advocating religious tolerance and interfaith harmony rapidly calmed the situation. Several Chinese figures confided to us that before Gus Dur came and quieted the situation, they had made contingency plans to flee Bangka on short notice.

## Barindo - Mass Movement or Money Politics?

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110. (SBU) Around the beginning of the election cycle, Eko organized a local chapter of Barindo (Barisan Indonesia), an entity that appears to be part political vehicle and part service organization. Barindo has chapters in 11 provinces, including Papua, Maluku, and Riau. The Mayor of Pangkalpinang, a senior Barindo figure, told us that the organization was established in Jakarta and aims to transcend both party politics and government bureaucracy by reaching out directly to the people. The Mayor said that the organization is run by several well-known retired generals in Jakarta and predicted that the organization would play a growing role in local and national elections.

111. (SBU) In Babel, Barindo ran a very expensive operation. Before, during, and after the official campaign period, giant billboards with Eko's photo were hung throughout the province announcing that he was the local Barindo chairman. Other than the word "Barindo", the billboards were indistinguishable from the many political posters that had to be taken down at the end of the official

campaign period. The organization also doled out gifts and assistance in a way designed to maximize political support for Eko: Barindo busses (bearing Eko's image) distributed free medical care and medication to impoverished areas, its agents distributed free food to poor families, and Eko, ostensibly in his capacity as chairman, handed out gifts in the organization's name directly to Mosques and ulamas.

¶12. (SBU) Barindo was widely criticized by observers as a scheme to skirt laws limiting the campaign period and banning money politics. Its supporters called those claims sour grapes and said Barindo was simply a charitable organization designed to "help people."

Flawed voter lists, weak enforcement mar election

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¶13. (SBU) Even though Babel is a relatively small and affluent province, the gubernatorial election was afflicted with some of the same problems that have plagued other recent elections: flawed voter registration lists, weak enforcement of election rules, and money politics. Because the election returns of the top two candidates differed by less than two percent, several observers, including a prominent journalist, pointedly wondered if the combination of flawed lists and electoral dirty pool swung the election.

¶14. (SBU) Voter Registration: Unlike voter registration programs in the U.S., draft voter lists here are compiled by local governments working with the election commission. Once these two bodies have prepared a draft list, it is posted for several days so that voters can confirm that it is complete and correct. In Babel the lists were posted without fanfare at local government offices for a total of three days. None of the several dozen voters we spoke with in the capital understood the registration process or how the lists were prepared. None reported seeing the draft registration lists.

¶15. (SBU) According to the Public Election Commission (KPU), more than 700,000 of the province's 1 million residents were registered

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to vote, an impossibly high percentage given Babel's demographics. In other provinces barely 50 percent of the population is eligible to vote. Some of the 200,000 surplus voters were people who moved away from the province; others, however, were children, some as young as 12 years old, who were improperly registered. Several candidates formally requested the KPU review the voter list. Claiming implausibly that its hands were tied by election regulations, KPU declined to do so.

¶16. (SBU) Despite the inflated voter rolls, numerous people who appeared otherwise qualified to vote were unable to do so because their names were not on the registration lists. While it is not clear how many voters may have been disenfranchised, Consulate officials met dozens at polling sites around the capital and heard reports from official poll monitors and other contacts that the problem was widespread throughout the province, particularly in ethnic Chinese communities.

¶17. (SBU) The head of the Public Election Commission (KPU) attributed the flawed registration lists to two factors: unmotivated local officials charged with compiling the lists and poorly written election laws which strictly limit how long the lists may be posted before being finalized. By contrast, the heads of several political campaigns blamed KPU for the errors because that body had done virtually nothing to educate voters or local officials about the registration process. KPU also, they said, refused to use its discretion to reopen the registration lists or delay the election until the errors could be corrected.

¶18. (SBU) Enforcement of Regulations: each of the candidates' campaigns claimed to have reported rule violations to the official Election Observer Committee (PANWAS). None was satisfied with the outcome. Several campaigns were particularly outraged by Barindo's campaign-like activities, particularly those taking place before and after the official campaign period, and were unsatisfied with PANWAS's refusal to take action on the grounds that "Barindo is not a political party." Religious leaders and two gubernatorial candidates also said that they complained to PANWAS about the overt

use of race and religion by rival campaigns, but were unable to so much as elicit a public statement from PANWAS condemning the practice.

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